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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000235

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TAGS: PREL EFIN IR MU

SUBJECT: SULTAN'S ADVISOR SPEAKS ON IRAN

REF: 07 MUSCAT 904

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo per 1.4 (B and D).

Summary

¶11. (C) Iran is taking advantage of America's misperceived weakness in the region in order to court the Arab street and fill the resulting power vacuum in the region, according to Special Advisor to the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, Abdul 'Aziz al-Rowas. In a meeting with the Ambassador March 25, the once powerful Information Minister, who also has served occasionally as the Sultan's special envoy to Iran, also pointed out the differing political agendas of Iran's Supreme Leader Khamanei, who wants to protect the Islamic revolution and ensure the Iranian nation's survival, and President Ahmadinejad, who seeks to create the conditions for the return of the mahdi. He urged, therefore, that the U.S. consider addressing the Supreme Leader's concerns, "which you have the power to do," as opposed to Ahmadinejad's, "which are impossible." Al Rowas advised the next U.S. administration to concentrate on "reestablishing America's reputation and prominence" in the region, starting with a reenergized campaign to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a concerted effort to strengthen the U.S. dollar. End summary.

Divide Khamanei and Ahmadinejad

¶12. (C) Al Rowas stated that the Supreme Leader and the Iranian president have differing agendas. The former seeks above all to preserve the Islamic revolution and ensure the survival of Iran and the revolutionary government. Ahmadinejad, on the other hand, is looking to sow discord and instability "wherever he can" in order to hasten the coming of the mahdi. Their agendas coincide now only because both feel threatened by the U.S. Address the interests of one, said al Rowas, and the U.S. can effectively turn one against the other and "change the character of Iran."

¶13. (C) Al Rowas dismissed the possibility of anyone realistically coming to terms with Ahmadinejad and his ideological mentor, Mohammad Taghi Mesbah-Yazdi. "It's impossible," he asserted, as only an insane person would seek instability "for any reason." However, the former minister argued, the U.S. and its western allies can address Khamanei's concerns. "You have the power," he reasoned, to convince Khamanei that the U.S. is not a threat to either Iran or the Islamic revolution. It might require direct and protracted dialog between the two governments but once successful, the U.S. would effectively marginalize Ahmadinejad and end Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Both Iranian leaders see the acquisition of nuclear weapons as serving their purposes. If Khamanei can be convinced that his agenda can be achieved without nuclear weapons, according to al Rowas, then he would agree to terminate Iran's military

nuclear program.

Iran: Riding the Crest

¶4. (C) Al Rowas said that the Iranians see the U.S. as weakened in the region. They tell people in the region that anyone supported by the Americans, e.g., Abu Mazen, Fuad Siniora and others, faces declining fortunes. In their distorted logic, American influence in the region is in decline, presenting Iran with an historic opportunity to reassert itself. Moreover, he emphasized, the U.S. should not underestimate Iran's use of misinformation, outright fabrication and intimidation to convince the region that "it's Iran's turn." This is part of Shi'a "tagia," the authority to employ whatever means necessary)- even those normally considered immoral -- to achieve ends consistent with the faith. He pointed to the standard examples where their efforts have been successful: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine. "They're riding the crest of a wave," he said.

¶5. (C) As is often the case, mused al Rowas, the Iranians have miscalculated. He said that he had told the head of an Iranian delegation which recently visited Muscat for political talks with the Omanis, that while indeed their fortunes are somewhat better, they are misreading the region and the staying power of the U.S. and the West and losing an opportunity to achieve major concessions from them. He told the Iranian that the West is prepared to offer strengthened economic cooperation, greater trade opportunities, technology transfer and, most important for the Iranian psyche, recognition as a major player in the region. "You are foolish," he reportedly told the Iranian delegation head, for sacrificing all of that and more "for weapons the U.S. and the West will never allow you to acquire anyway." He further

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warned the Iranians that "no one will join you in your isolation."

Advice for the Next U.S. Administration

¶6. (C) Al Rowas expressed considerable interest in the ongoing U.S. presidential campaign. He said the next president would face more challenges in the Middle East than any previous administration. In addition to the obvious issues)- the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and terrorism)- the next president will have to take up the matter of America's damaged image in the region. "We are more concerned about this," he advised, "because if America isn't respected in the region, it's an invitation for misbehavior by Iran and others."

¶7. (C) He cautioned that it is not a question of American military might. The U.S. must again be seen to wield political and economic power too in order to bring peace and stability to the region. The region has seen too much U.S. military action in the last few years and not enough diplomatic and economic effort, where "you can exercise leadership no one else can." The first place to start, he suggested, was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a solution to which would "transform" the region and the U.S. image. Secondly, he advised, the U.S. needed to act to strengthen the U.S. dollar. "Arabs won't respect a power whose currency is so weak."

Comment

¶8. (C) For someone out of the mainstream of the Omani government and whose portfolio hardly requires it, al Rowas appeared surprisingly well informed about Iran. He referred often by name to a number of prominent Iranian opinion leaders and recent Iranian political activities, suggesting that he continues to follow regularly and in some detail events in Iran. Al Rowas has not traveled to Iran since Ahmadinejad's election victory two years ago -) he was tapped by the Sultan to personally deliver the Sultan's

congratulatory message to the newly elected president)- and expressed a clear wish never to return. Nevertheless, he is someone whom the Iranians know and continue to seek out. He noted that the above referenced Iranian delegation had requested the meeting with him.

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